

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C-13

WASHINGTON POST
3 April 1984

JACK ANDERSON

Japan Discloses Soviet Dialogue On Downed Jet

On rare occasions, American presidents overrule their intelligence advisers and release top-secret information they feel the public should know, even though the release compromises intelligence gathering. An example was President Kennedy's release of aerial spy photos during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

The last time such sensitive information was deliberately released, it was Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone who made the decision. At serious cost to his intelligence agencies, he disclosed the intercepted radio transmission of Soviet pilots during the final minutes of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 in the early hours of Sept. 1, 1983.

The Soviet pilots' reports to their ground control stations proved that the unarmed airliner with 269 civilians aboard had been downed. The Japanese release of this damning evidence came at a time when the Soviets were still denying that they had shot the plane down. Without the Japanese tape, they might never have admitted the atrocity.

On a recent trip to Tokyo, my associate Dale Van Atta learned the

dramatic details of Nakasone's decision. All times are Tokyo time:

- Sept. 1, 3:38 a.m.: The Japanese radar station at Wakkanai, Hokkaido, which had been tracking the unidentified aircraft's progress, saw the blip disappear from the screen less than 50 miles away. The trackers thought it was probably a Soviet plane that had gone down.

- 7:30 a.m.: The Korean government, which has no diplomatic relations with Moscow, asked the Japanese to find out, through their Moscow embassy, if the Soviets had forced the missing KAL flight down over Sakhalin Island.

- At about the same time, the Wakkanai listening post began an arduous search of the tapes of Soviet radio transmissions for the crucial time period. Hours later, the tape and the radar chronology were matched up.

- The contents of the incriminating tape—in which the Soviet pilots discussed the "target" and its destruction in detail—were withheld from Nakasone for at least an hour by his chief cabinet secretary, Masaharu Gotoda.

- When the prime minister was finally told, he asked Gotoda if the information had been shared with the United States. Told it hadn't, Nakasone snapped: "Why the hell are we wasting our time? They are our allies!"

- 8:15 p.m.: Foreign Minister

Shintaro Abe told a press conference that KAL-007 had crashed, and might have been shot down.

- 8:30 p.m.: Soviet Ambassador to Japan Vladimir Pavlov was summoned to the Foreign Ministry and was asked for information. He said he had none.

- 9:30 p.m.: The Soviet Foreign Ministry told the Japanese embassy in Moscow it still had no information.

- 11:45 p.m.: Secretary of State George P. Shultz told a news conference the Soviets had shot down KAL-007.

- Sept. 2, 2:15 a.m.: Tass reported that an unknown aircraft had violated Soviet airspace and fighter planes had scrambled.

- 3:40 a.m.: Ambassador Pavlov told the Foreign Ministry only what Tass had reported.

- 11 a.m.: Gotoda told a news conference that KAL 007 had been shot down by a Soviet air-to-air missile.

- Sept. 3, 1:50 a.m.: Tass made another announcement, still containing no mention of a shoot-down.

- 10 a.m.: Foreign Minister Abe dressed down Ambassador Pavlov, blaming the Soviets for shooting down the plane. Pavlov reported that some fragments of KAL 007 had been found.

Faced with an obvious Soviet attempt at a cover-up, Nakasone made the decision to release the incriminating tape.